

SPARK – SEED – SPREAD INNOVATION FUNDING PROGRAM

Announcing three tiers of funding coupled with training to help support your innovation efforts

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Overview

As part of VA's Innovators Network, we wanted to find a way to further accelerate innovations taking place at the VA to best serve Veterans and their supporters. We believe that our employees are the beating heart of the VA—they know the challenges all too well, and are the most equipped to identify potential solutions. Therefore, we want to invest in the people who make this organization great to help further catalyze innovation efforts across the VA.

We are excited to announce a new platform to address VA system-level challenges called the **Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Funding Program** for employees to both learn innovation-related competencies, such as Human Centered Design, and also gain access to funding + support to enable employees' innovation efforts! We also believe in testing new ideas / products / processes on a small scale prevents the VA from committing resources on a large scale to things that don't work and ensure they are delivering value to Veterans and employees along the way.

Here's How It Works

We are providing 3 tiers of funding:

- 1) **'Spark' grants (\$5-10K) - Proof of Concept Projects:** This level of funding helps you develop initial proof of concept 'prototypes' where there is a strong problem statement and potentially some preliminary evidence or strong theory of action.
- 2) **'Seed' grants (~\$50K) – Pilot projects:** This level of funding helps further develop your proof of concept and test it out in the form of a pilot. For these projects, there is a moderate evidence base and funding is provided for replication grants designed to pilot, test, and validate effectiveness of your proof of concept innovation.

3) 'Spread' grants (\$100-\$500K): Implementation and scaling

projects: This level of funding helps you spread, diffuse, or scale your innovation projects to other clinics or sites at the VA. The evidence base for these projects is mature and they are deemed suitable for scaling because they have been vetted by the appropriate stakeholders and have been proven effective through pilot or replication studies.

You can apply for this program through this link:

<http://www.innovation.va.gov/innovatorsnetwork/>

This application process is quite different than you have seen elsewhere at the VA. We are using Human Centered Design practices to help guide the application to ensure we are focused on innovations that are Veteran- or employee-centric. By utilizing human centered design practices, it allows you to co-create and work directly with the people your innovation impacts throughout your application process. Depending on which level you are applying for, we will guide you through the human centered design methodology, including the following activities:

- a. Provide us with the problem that you solving by understanding the needs of the stakeholders involved
- b. Provide us with a description of a potential solution that you have co-designed with your users + project stakeholders
- c. Provide us with the details about the value your innovation brings to the VA and Veterans!

You can apply and check out the application through the following link:

<http://www.innovation.va.gov/innovatorsnetwork/>. You can also check out a copy of the application questions in the Appendix.

If selected to receive funding, you and your grantee team will enter the Spark–Seed–Spread Accelerator Model!

Modeled after HHS' Ignite Program, NASA's Launch Program, and Department of Energy's Catalyst model, grantees will get teaching + training and guidance on bringing their innovation forward. This virtual 5-month accelerator model will provide the following:

- Kick-off 'bootcamp' and finale demonstration presentations to help provide teaching and training opportunities, access to an innovation 'tribe' of like-minded VA innovators, and a stage to amplify your innovation efforts.
- Coaching and individualized mentorship
- Access to a larger network of innovators and advisors, along with support from the Innovation Specialist at your site
- On-the-job exposure to human centered design methodologies, creating + measuring value with innovation projects, and entrepreneurship methodologies

- A framework + guidance for bringing your innovation forward
- Financial and resource support through Spark-Seed – Spread innovation grants

If I get a grant, what am I committing to?

- Weekly / Every-other-week check-ins with a mentor over the phone
- Obtaining your supervisor's approval
- 5-20% of your time over the duration of the program depending on the size of your project
- Meeting milestones associated with the Accelerator

What are the criteria by which the grant applications will be assessed?

Criteria	Explanation
Ability to deliver value (clinical, operational, financial, customer, and societal)	<p>How does your innovation project deliver value in some or all of the areas below?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Clinical Value</u>: Expressed as an improvement in health (ex: overall management of chronic disease within a panel, such as A1c <8%) • <u>Operational Value</u>: Expressed as a measure of increased efficiency or productivity (ex: time to appointment, number of patients seen) • <u>Financial Value</u>: Expressed as a reduction or avoidance of a hard dollar cost, or return of investment • <u>Customer Value</u>: Expressed as an increase in convenience or reduction in cost to Veterans (ex: access or receipt of timely visit, self-reported quality of life) • <u>Societal Value</u>: Expressed as a broad good to society. May or may not be financial (ex: Does this help inform broader healthcare challenges for Veterans and non-Veterans?)
Feasibility to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this project feasible to implement at the VA? • Does it integrate well with existing systems, such existing organizations, infrastructure, technology systems, processes, and policies?
Scope of impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this project addressing system-level challenges? (i.e. is this project helping more than 1 domain and more than 1 site?) • Is this project of strategic importance to VA (ex: is it tied to improving the employee experience, improving the Veteran experience?)
Portability/ Scalability	Can this innovation be easily implemented or diffused at other sites?
Stakeholder buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the applicant have passion for this work? • Do they have support locally for this innovation project from both potential users and leaders? • For Seed and Spread grants, has this gained leadership and champion support at the local level (or national level)?
Fit for Innovation	<p>Is this project a process improvement? If yes, then it is a better fit for lean and performance improvement activities <i>[Lean and process improvement activities are incredible tools for the back end after a process or product has already been implemented. We are focused on the front end of the innovation cycle with this grant to help develop new approaches based on users' needs to have an impact. Check out the FAQ below for more details.]</i></p> <p>Are their known solutions for this problem you are trying to solve for already in the VA? If yes, then we will help connect you to the existing solution to help you tailor it to local needs outside of this program.</p>

How can I apply?

You can apply through the following link innovation.va.gov/innovatorsnetwork

What are the deadlines?

The deadline to apply is **Monday, December 14th**. At this point, you will begin to receive feedback from mentors and further iterate on your application and submit further information. The goal for this application is to co-build it with your innovation users, get feedback from innovation mentors, and then submit your final application based on stakeholder's feedback. Even though you will continue to iterate on your application until the final deadline, we **highly, highly highly** encourage you to submit your first pass of your application by Monday, December 14th. As you can see from the application, it is very short! The timeline for the Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Program is below.

Milestone	Date
Deadline to apply	Monday, December 14 th
First round of feedback on application given to applicant	Monday, December 21st
Second draft of application due	Monday, January 18 th
Second round of feedback on application given to applicant	Monday, January 25 th
Final submission due with supervisor approval	Monday, February 8 th
Notification of grantee recipients	Week of February 21st
Launch Spark – Seed –Spread Accelerator Program	Week of March 14th
Accelerator finale demo event: Innovation Showcase!	Friday, July 9 th [tentative]

FAQ

Who can I contact to learn more?

You should contact your site's Innovation Specialist to learn more about the Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Funding program (see names and emails below). If you don't know who your Innovation Specialist is, please contact Andrea Ippolito (andrea.ippolito@va.gov) and she will introduce you!

- Atlanta: Michelle McBee, Michelle.McBee2@va.gov
- Biloxi: Boots Brinkman, Helen.Brinkman@va.gov
- Boston: John Dadamo + Saurabha Bhatnagar, John.Dadamo@va.gov, Saurabha.Bhatnagar@va.gov

- Chillicothe: Scott Bryant, Scott.Bryant3@va.gov
- Jackson: Katie Babineaux + Sekila Agrett, Katie.Babineaux@va.gov, Sekila.Argrett@va.gov
- Milwaukee: Kayt Havens, Hilary Ryan, Kristyn Ertl, Kathryn.Havens@va.gov, Hilary.Ryan@va.gov, Kristyn.Ertl@va.gov
- Portland: Judy McConnachie, Judy.McConnachie@va.gov
- San Francisco: Angie Waldrop + Chris Brazell, Angela.Waldrop@va.gov, Christopher.Brazell@va.gov

What are the deadlines?

The deadline to apply is Monday, December 14th.

Can I apply at any point?

Ideally, you would begin your application to meet the first deadline on December 14, 2015. That being said, the application builds, so you can apply at any point. We **highly, highly** encourage you to apply in the first round though because mentors will be helping to shape and guide your proposal, thus making it more likely that you will get selected!

How does the accelerator work?

Modeled after HHS' Ignite Program, NASA's Launch Program, and Department of Energy's Catalyst model, grantees will get teaching + training and guidance on bringing their innovation forward. This virtual 5-month accelerator model will provide the following:

- Kick-off 'bootcamp' and finale demonstration presentations to help provide teaching and training opportunities, access to an innovation 'tribe' of like-minded VA innovators, and a stage to amplify your innovation efforts.
- Coaching and individualized mentorship
- Access to a larger network of innovators and advisors, along with support from the Innovation Specialist at your site
- On-the-job exposure to human centered design methodologies, creating + measuring value with innovation projects, and entrepreneurship methodologies
- A framework + guidance for bringing your innovation forward
- Financial and resource support through Spark-Seed – Spread innovation grants

What participating innovator grantees commit to:

- Weekly / Every-other week check-ins with a mentor over the phone
- Obtaining their supervisor approval
- 5-20% of your time over the duration of the program depending on the size of your project
- Meeting milestones associated with the Accelerator

With your final application submission, we ask that you obtain the support of your supervisor to apply.

How does the funding work?

After you are selected, we will transfer the money to your medical center through a TDA. This funding can be used for personnel, services, designer and developer time through the Veterans Engineering Resource Center, or materials (and other items as well). We will work with you to approve the funding use. Please note: the funding for personnel must be used in FY 2016.

Can the funding cross fiscal years?

If the funding is being used for resources, then it can cross fiscal years. If the funding is being used for personnel, then it cannot cross fiscal years!

What type of dollars are these?

The dollars are a mix of medical service and IT dollars. They are appropriated.

Is this just for IT innovations?

NO!!! This is for all types of innovation, whether they are IT, devices, processes, policies, services, platforms, care pathways, new care models, etc. We are innovation agnostic! Innovation takes all shapes and forms and we want to hear your thoughts!

How do you define what an innovation is?

Innovation is the conversion of a new idea into impact, whether it be for employees or for our customers.

What is human centered design?

Human Centered Design (HCD) is a methodology for problem solving that focuses on human needs first, that takes a creative and iterative approach to finding new solutions to their human needs. Human Centered Design training is one of Secretary Bob's top priority areas for the VA because it will enable us to create a consistent experience for Veterans across the VA. As defined by Tim Brown, the CEO of one of the nation's leading design firms Ideo, 'a human centered design approach to innovation draws from a designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.'

Check out VA Center for Innovator's Network to learn more about Human Centered Design: <http://www.innovation.va.gov/hcd.asp>

What is the difference between human centered design and lean six sigma?

Human Centered Design is at the front end of innovation and it is a discipline in which the needs, behaviors, and experiences of an organization's customers (or users) drive product, service, or technology design processes. It is a practice used heavily in the private sector to build a strong understanding of users, generate ideas for new products and services, test concepts with real people, and ultimately deliver easy-to-use, consistent products and positive customer experiences.

Lean Six Sigma is a complementary methodology that is focused on the back end of an innovation process. It helps streamline operations and be more responsive to customers once a product, service, or technology is already in place.

What is VA's Innovators Network?

The Innovators Network is a safe space for VA employees to test new ideas, and join forces with stakeholders across the Veteran community to improve the way VA serves Veterans.

The Innovators Network, is driven by a few core principles:

- **Our employees are the beating heart of the VA**—they know the challenges all too well, and are the most equipped to identify potential solutions.
- **Innovation is not just ideas.** It's the conversion of a new idea into impact, whether it be for employees or for our customers.
- **The solutions are in the field, not in the central office.**
- **Innovation is a process to lean on** as an employee to improve and reimagine the way VA serves Veterans.
- **Innovation is a muscle**, and we want VA employees to have the muscle they need to develop professionally in their own careers and serve Veterans in the process.
- **Innovation is most effective when it is borne of diverse perspectives.** We create actionable opportunities for VA employees, Veterans, and other stakeholders to co-design solutions.
- **Innovation is most valuable when it is shared.** We are not solving problems for any one VA site—we are solving problems for an entire community. Our success is their success and we need to do a better job of celebrating innovation and sharing best practices across VA sites.
- **Test small, fail small, scale big.** Testing new ideas / products / processes on a small scale prevents the VA from committing resources on a large scale to things that don't work.
- **We are Veteran-Centered.** Solving problems effectively requires a relentless commitment to prioritizing the needs of Veterans over the needs of the agency.

Currently, we are pilot testing VA Innovators Network at 8 sites across the VA.

The components of VA Innovators Network include:

- Dedicated Innovation Specialists – 1.0FTE per pilot site for 1 year
- Training to develop core competencies and toolkits, e.g. HCD, innovation value creation
- Engagement and outreach support to share good news stories of VA
- Spark – Seed – Spread Innovation Funding Program for innovation development delivered over three phases: 1) prototype development, 2) pilot initiative, 3) implement/deploy

You can learn more about the Innovators Network at
<http://www.innovation.va.gov/innovatorsnetwork/>

How is this different than VA Idea House?

VA Idea House is a platform for any VA employee to offer ideas online to help modernize VA's culture, processes and capabilities (not just innovation). You can submit ideas online and reviewers from across the enterprise will review and get selected. The Spark-Seed-Spread Innovation Funding Program is for employees to both learn innovation-related competencies, such as Human Centered Design, and also gain access to funding + support to enable employees' innovation efforts.

APPENDIX

The final application questions across the Spark – Seed – Spread innovation grants are shown below.

Please note: These are the final list of application questions. During the first phases of submission, the questions will lead up to these ones.

SPARK INNOVATION – application questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your email?
3. What is your phone #?
4. What is your title and position?
5. What site are you located at?
6. What problem are you trying to solve?

Help text: Please identify this problem in 200 words or less.

7. What is your proposed 'proof of concept' design? With your answer, please include the following:
- Proposed 'proof of concept' design that you hope to develop with this Tier 1 funding + resources (200 words or less).
 - 1-2 uses cases for this proof of concept design (150 words or less)

8. What is your proposed plan for developing this proof of concept design (150 words or less)?

Help text: Please identify the goal, timeline, and milestones for developing this proof of concept design.

9. How much funding do you need (\$10K or less) and what will this funding be used for (150 words or less)?

10. Please describe how this proof of concept project provides value in the following areas: clinical value, operational value, financial value, customer value, and societal value. The help text below further defines these categories. Please note: Your project does not have to provide value across all 5 categories.

Help text: Please describe this in 150 words or less. The definitions for each value type is as follows

- Clinical Value: Expressed as an improvement in health.
- Operational Value: Expressed as a measure of increased efficiency or productivity.
- Financial Value: Expressed as a reduction or avoidance of a hard dollar cost.
- Customer Value: Expressed as an increase in convenience or reduction in cost to Veterans
- Societal Value: Expressed as a broad good to society. May or may not be financial.

11. Please include a letter of support from your supervisor.

SEED INNOVATION – application questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your email?
3. What is your phone #?
4. What is your title and position?

5. What site are you located at?
6. What is your proposed solution to help solve the problem you submitted during Phase 'A'? Please describe the current state of this project and how you developed this proposed solution.
Help text: Please describe this in 200 words or less. Also please feel free to attach images of your proposed proof of concept.
7. What is your proposed pilot to test out your proposed solution? Please describe the pilot plan, including goals, timeline, milestones, 'what success looks like', and how you will measure success (activity + outcome measures). Please describe this in 300 words or less. Feel free to attach 1-2 slides or an excel file if you need it to help describe your plan.
8. Who are the key stakeholders who are driving this effort? For instance, who describe your local champions, along with key stakeholders executing and supporting the pilot project.
Help text: Please only outline their titles only, not names.
9. Please describe the business case for this pilot project. Please your answer from the first round of application surrounding defining the different types of value and get more granular (clinical value, operational value, financial value, customer value, and societal value). The help text below further defines these categories. Please note: Your project does not have to provide value across all 5 categories.
Help text: Please describe this in 150 words or less. The definitions for each value type is as follows
 - *Clinical Value: Expressed as an improvement in health.*
 - *Operational Value: Expressed as a measure of increased efficiency or productivity.*
 - *Financial Value: Expressed as a reduction or avoidance of a hard dollar cost.*
 - *Customer Value: Expressed as an increase in convenience or reduction in cost to Veterans*
 - *Societal Value: Expressed as a broad good to society. May or may not be financial.*
10. What work have you done to validate that this proposed solution solves the problem and is 'pilot ready' (150 words or less)?
11. How much funding do you need (\$50K or less) and what will this funding be used for (150 words or less)?
12. Please include a letter of support from your supervisor.

SPREAD INNOVATION – application questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your email?
3. What is your phone #?
4. What is your title and position?
5. What site are you located at?
6. What is your proposed solution to help solve the problem you submitted during Phase 'A'? Please describe the current state of this project and how you developed this proposed solution.
Help text: Please describe this in 200 words or less. Also please feel free to attach images of your proposed proof of concept.
7. What is your implementation, scaling and diffusion plan? Please describe the plan, including goals, timeline, milestones, locations, stakeholders, 'what success looks like', and how you will measure success (activity + outcome measures). Please describe this in 300 words or less. Feel free to attach 1-2 slides or an excel file if you need it to help describe your plan.
8. Who are the key stakeholders who are driving this effort? For instance, please describe your local champions, along with key stakeholders executing the scaling of your project.

Help text: Please only outline their titles only, not names.
9. Please include and attach letters of support from champions at the sites that will be helping your to scale and implement your solutions.
10. Please describe the business case for this pilot project. Please use your answer from the first round of application surrounding defining the different types of value and get more granular (clinical value, operational value, financial value, customer value, and societal value). The help text below further defines these categories. Please note: Your project does not have to provide value across all 5 categories.
Help text: Please describe this in 150 words or less. The definitions for each value type is as follows
 - *Clinical Value: Expressed as an improvement in health.*

- *Operational Value: Expressed as a measure of increased efficiency or productivity.*
- *Financial Value: Expressed as a reduction or avoidance of a hard dollar cost.*
- *Customer Value: Expressed as an increase in convenience or reduction in cost to Veterans*
- *Societal Value: Expressed as a broad good to society. May or may not be financial.*

11. What work have you done to validate that this proposed solution solves the problem and is 'implementing and scale' ready to other sites at the VA.

Help text: Please describe this in 150 words or less.

12. How much funding do you need (\$500K or less) and what will this funding be used for? Please describe it in 200 words or less and attach an excel file with the proposed budget.

13. Please include a letter of support from your supervisor.